

Chapter- 4

Ganer Bari (Musical Soiree House)

After the defeat of Nawab Siraj-u-Dowla (1730-1758) in 1757, Ganer Baris (Musical Houses) were established in the estates of small landlords. From the amount collected as tax from the subjects, a huge amount of money remained as surplus after meeting the basic necessities of the landlords and they used this money for recreational purposes. Among the amusements, Baiji Dance, Instrumental Music, Khyamta Dance, Kite flying, Cockfight and Horse race are worth mentioned.¹ The type of recreation depended on the taste of the landlord. To retain this in give amusement its permanent form, Jalsha Ghar, Naach Mahal and Durbar Halls were established. After the shifting of the capital to Calcutta, musical soirees were held in different houses. During the reign of the British East India Company (1757-1947) a number of Jalsha Ghars were established in East Bengal. Among those famous houses, were the Durbar of the then Maharaja of Tripura Beerchandra Manikya, the house of Keshob Banarjee who was the landlord of Murzpara in Dhaka, the house of zaminder Narendra Narayan Ray Chowdhury of Baldha State (1880-1943), the house of the landlord of Baliadi State in Kaliakair, Gazipur, the house of Biraj Mahan Babu, the landlord of Kishoreganj; the Jalsha Ghar of Gauripur of Maharaja, Brajendra Kishor Ray Chowdhary of Mymensingh; besides these, there were also the Ramgopalpur estate of landlord Harendra Kishor Ray Chowdhury and Bhabanipur estate of Jyotish Chandra Ray Chowdhury; the Kalipur estate of Promoda Kanto Lahiri, the house of Shushang Durgapur Maharaja, the house of the Maharaja of Dinajpur; the Radhanagar Landlord House of Pandit Barin Majumdar (1919-2001) of Pabna; the house of Jyotirindranath Maitra (1911-1977) of Pabna, the Royal House established by Raghu Nandan, Raja of Natore Jagindranath Roy and Rani Bhabani (17th century), the Kashimpur estate of Savar, Gokul fine arts in Dhamrai, the house of the landlord of Teota and Teroshree in Manikganj have played an important role in the promotion, patronization and spread of classical music. Some of the above-mentioned landlords themselves practiced music. Their cultivation of music earned a dignified position not only in

¹ Mamun, Muntasir, *Unish Shotoker Bangla Natok*, Bangladesh Shulpa Kala Academy, Dhaka, 1979.

East Bengal but also in music competitions held in Kolkata, Delhi, Lucknow and Alahabad. In the same way famous singers, instrumentalists and dancers from these places enthralled the Jalsha Ghars of East Bengal. For these reasons Ganer Bari hold important positions in talking about the tradition of classical music in Bangladesh for centuries. The following section presents a brief history of the one very important Ganer Bari (Jalsha Ghar):

Ruplal House: (1700-1800)

Mathura Nath Shaha Family was given the title of *Poddar* and sometimes *Baink* since used to run business to earn their living. They hailed from the village called Shubhaddya at the Keraniganj Thana, which was situated across the river Buriganga of Dhaka. They used to deal in money exchange at the Banglabazar area in Dhaka. Mathura Nath used to run his business by the bank of the river of Farashganj using just a mat on the roadside. He used to exchange the old and torn notes and earn a percentage. He needed a office after his business flourished. Sharupchandra Shaha (death-1867) and Madhushudan Shaha were his two sons. They made it even bigger with their father's business. Madhushudan's son's name was Radhika Mohan Shaha. But the descendants of the Sharupchandra contributed in promoting music. Sharupchandra had three sons. Shanatan Shaha was the eldest, after who was Ruplal Shaha (1845-1913). Among the three sons of Sharupchandra Ruplal patronized classical music. During that time they moved to 6-Hemendra Kumar Len in Dhaka. He established the historical "Ruplal House" for the purpose of organizing of music functions. Ruplal House used to be packed with the gathering of the famous artists came from various places of the Indian subcontinent. The authority of Ruplal House invited Lord Daflin 1888: a British citizen to join the ball dance there. Ustad Bade Ghulam Ali Khan's uncle Ustad Kalay Khan was the official singer at the palace of landlord of Murapara and also performed there.² At that time all the famous performers who came to Dhaka used to visit this place and perform. Though Ruplal's son Radhaballav Shaha earned a good name as a businessperson he put in

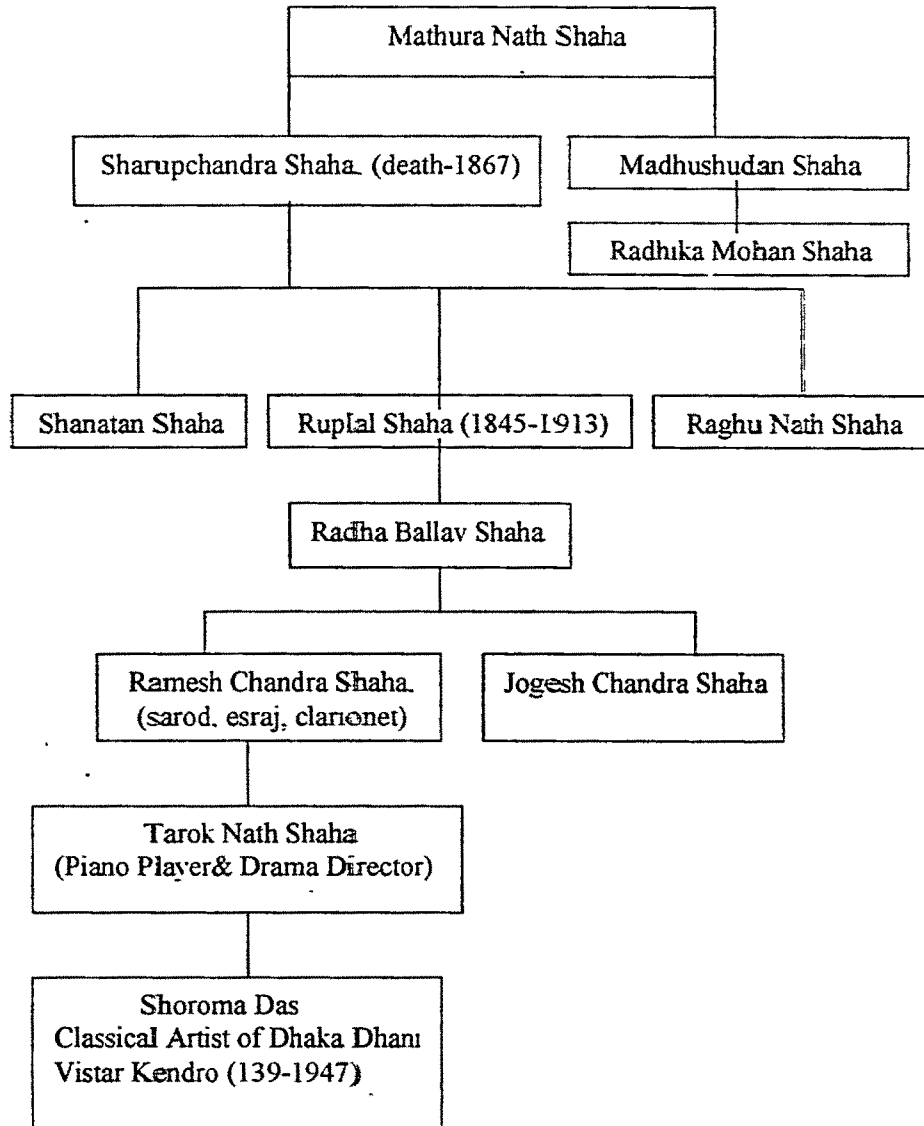
² Mamun. Muntasir. Dhaka Smriti Bismritir Nagori, ANONEL. Dhaka. February- 2000, Page-189-195

his best efforts to further the cause of music. Radhaballav had two sons. After the death of their grandfather Ruplal Shaha in 1913, Rameshchandra and Jogishchandra consistently continued with the development of music. Jogishchandra could not earn efficiency in art but he was eager to gain knowledge. Rameshchandra acquired much skill in painting. Besides, he learnt to play sarod, esraj and clarinet. Rameshchandra was a successful descendent of this family. After him his son Taroknath Shaha continued his work. So far only male member of that family perform in public; but Taroknath's wife Sharoma Das had the opportunity to be the first female instrument player of Dhaka Betar. She used to perform Tagore's music and classical music on guitar regularly from radio center. And Taroknath used to practice both western and North Indian classical music on piano. Besides, he earned fame in the field of drama and acting.⁵

During 1940 to 1946 there occurred a major affray in Dhaka and Calcutta. Famous writer and progressive literature Shomenchanda was assassinated in that chaos. In 1947 Indian subcontinent was partitioned into India and Pakistan as a consequence of the Two-Nation Theory masterminded by the British rulers. In 1948 the patron of the music of the Ruplal House Shaha family had to migrate to India as result of that affray. Like wise many music families had to leave East Bengal with a broken heart. As a result most of Jalsha Ghars of the East Bengal (the place where musical functions were held) became empty of music, which were once full with the sounds of music. Till today that place which is the heritage of classical music the Ruplal House stands as a remembrance and with pride by the banks of the river Buriganga at the border of Dhaka.

⁵Shah Mohammad Nazrul Alam, "Dhakay Shastri Sangeet Charcha Oitijha", Abohoran Bangla-Editor Mustaf Nr-ul-Islam, Feb 1999. Dhaka, Page- 246-261.

The Lineage of Ruplal House⁴



⁴ Mamun. Muntasir, " Dhaka Smriti Bismritir Nagari", Anonna, Feb- 2000, Dhaka, Page-189-195

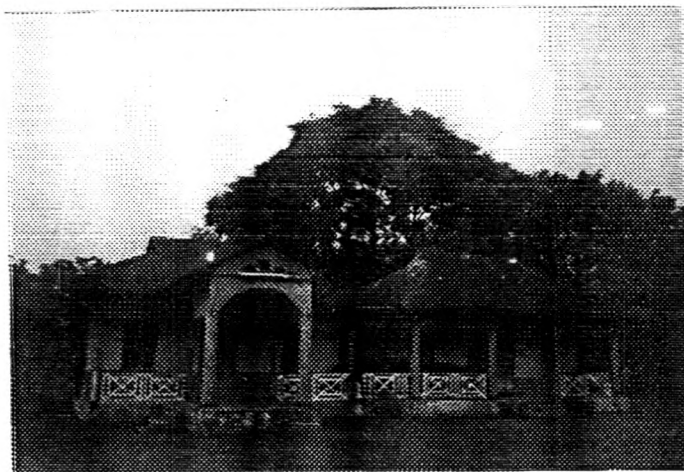
Names of the main Ganer Bari (Jalsha Ghar) of Bangladesh are given below:

1. Ruplal House: Farashgang, Dhaka
2. The Balda Landlord House: Narinda, Dhaka
3. Gauripur House: Mymensingh
4. Muktagachha Jalsha Ghar: Mymensingh
5. The House of Shushang Durgapur: Mharaja Netrokona
6. The Royal House of Natore: Rajshahi
7. The Landlord House of Talodo: Rajshahi
8. The Radhanagar Landlord House: Pabna
9. The Lahiri House: Rangpur

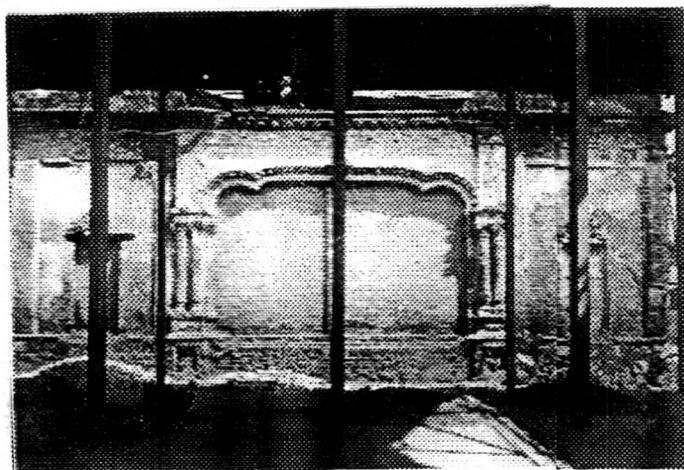
Photographs of some very important Ganer Bari (Jalsha Ghar) are given below:



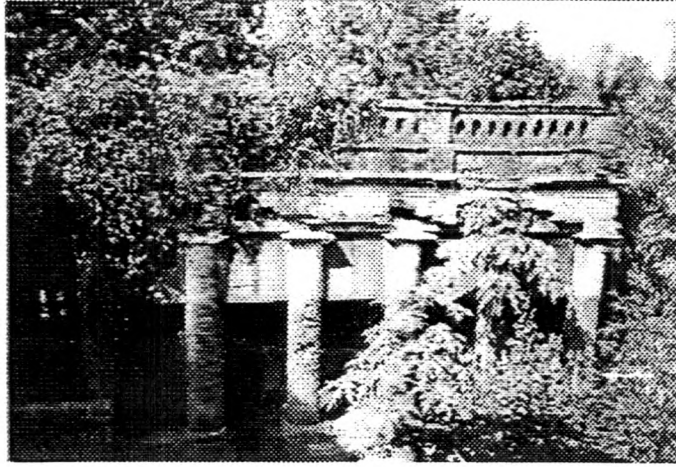
Ramgpur Rajbari



House of Shushang Maharaja



Gauripur Jalsha Ghar



Kashimpur (Savar, Dhaka)



House of Reboti Mohan Das (Dhaka City)